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Moscow's Changing of the Guard at the K.G.B.

Vitaly V. Fedorchuk

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MOSCOW, May 27 — A voice answering the telephone at K.G.B. headquarters, when asked for background information on the agency's new chairman, answered firmly, "No one will give you that information."

It seemed a particularly appropriate comment on the appointment of Col. Gen. Vitaly Vasilyevich Fedorchuk, an obscure, 63-year-old

Ukrainian career officer, as head of the Soviet Union's vast and shadowy intelligence and internal security agency.

The announcement Wednesday on the selection of a man who will now rank among the most powerful in the Soviet Union merely said that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the nominal body making Cabinet-level appointments, had made General Fedorchuk the chairman of the K.G.B., the agency whose Russian initials stand for Committee for State Security.

While anonymity is the rule among Soviet leaders, most of them reach their positions via political routes that give some measure of the man. What seems significant in General Fedorchuk's case is that he has no apparent background in politics and that, for the first time since 1958, a professional again heads the K.G.B.

Party Sought to Insure Control

It was in 1958 that Nikita S. Khrushchev, then the Soviet leader, replaced Gen. Ivan S. Serov, a career officer, with Aleksandr N. Shelepin, head of the Young Communist League. The appointment was the first of a series designed to affirm party control over the secret police and prevent it from ever becoming a power structure likely to rival the party.

It may be that, after a quarter century of political control, the Soviet leadership is now confident that the K.G.B. has become thoroughly used to the idea that the party is dominant and that the direction of the agency can again be left to a career officer.

It may also be that the aging members of the ruling Politburo, wary of upsetting their fragile power balance by entrusting the powers of the agency to one of their number, felt more secure giving the post to a political outsider.

Alternatively, the Politburo, alarmed by events in Poland, unable to comprehend new trends and yearnings among younger generations and aware of an impending succession struggle, wanted to place the security agency in the hands of a tried professional.

In Security Service 43 Years

In any event, the party hierarchy, which makes all high appointments in the Soviet Union, appears to have found its man in General Fedorchuk.

Brief official biographical sketches show that was born in December 1918 and that from 1939, from the time he was 20, he has been associated with the Soviet intelligence and internal security service. He served with the Soviet armed forces in World War II, was graduated from the K.G.B. Academy and holds the rank of colonel general.

General Fedorchuk was appointed head of the K.G.B. in the Ukraine in July 1970 and, the following March, he was elected a member of the Ukrainian party's Central Committee. Local security officials are often also included in the Politburos, or ruling party bodies, of the Soviet republics, and General Fedorchuk joined the Ukrainian Politburo in February 1976.

Now that he has risen to the national level, he is also likely to become a member of the national party's Central Committee, especially since two agency deputy chairmen who were passed over in the selection of chairman—Gen. Georgi K. Tsinev and Col. Gen. Viktor M. Chebrikov—are members.

Under the outgoing agency chairman, Yuri V. Andropov, the K.G.B. also had a voice in the national Politburo. It remains to be seen whether General Fedorchuk, too, will be elevated to the nation's highest body by virtue of his new position.

Although much of General Fedorchuk's career appears to have been spent in the provinces rather than at the center of power, the Ukraine is the second most important Soviet republic, after the dominant Russian republic, and the standing of the K.G.B. office would reflect that significance.

The general's 43 years of security service spanned the German occupation of the Ukraine in World War II, frequent resurgence of Ukrainian nationalism, Jewish emigration and the impact of Polish liberalization in the western Ukraine, where ethnic Poles are a significant minority.



Associated Press

Ukrainian career officer is in